

A HISTORY
OF THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST,
OF THE
BAPTIST DENOMINATION,
IN
POTTER'S STREET,
NEAR
Harlow, Essex.

By JOHN BAIN,
PRESENT PASTOR.

1819.

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PREFACE.

TO THE CHURCH UNDER MY PASTORAL CARE.

Dearly beloved in the Lord; I have drawn up the following Narrative, with a view to your information, relative to the origin of this Branch of Zion, as far as it can be with any degree of certainty ascertained; and to rescue from oblivion the worthy names of those men of grace, whom the Great Head of the Church, who holds her stars in his right hand, hath been pleased to raise up and place over his flock here for the period of more than one hundred years past. In compliance with your unanimous request, it is now printed and published, in order that you might possess copies for your own use. I beg leave, therefore, to dedicate it to you, and in so doing let me request you to suffer the word of exhortation: "Remember them which have had the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Heb. xiii. 7, 8.

With pleasure I subscribe myself your affectionate Pastor,

JOHN BAIN.

Potter's Street, May 13,
1819.

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&c.

THERE are no documents extant that point out the origin of this interest. It is now conjectured that it originated from the preaching of a Mr. Woodward, one of the ejected ministers, in Nazing and in Harlow. After a time he became the pastor of the Baptist church in the latter place.*

The earliest account of this Church is taken from a funeral sermon preached by Mr. Benjamin Wallin, of Maisepond, London, in the meeting-house in the parish of Little Parndon, (about two miles from the present place of worship) on the death of Mr. Jonas Thorowgood, pastor of the church, who died July the 2nd, 1753, in the 76th

* Admitting the conjecture to be correct, that the interest of Christ in Potter's Street, took its rise out of the preaching in Nazing by Mr. W. ejected from the established church, and who embraced the distinguishing principles of the Baptists, it appears a striking coincidence, that the Vicar of Nazing, Mr. Arnold, was baptized in Potter's Street Meeting-house, together with his wife, August the 23rd, 1818; he having resigned the joint livings of Nazing and Roydon, amounting to more than £600 per annum.

year of his age, having been 36 years over them in the Lord. He was baptized in 1717, when about 21 years of age, by Mr. Peake, the then pastor of the church. How long prior to that, Mr. Peake had filled the pastoral office is not now known; but it is not to be questioned that the origin of this interest was of as early a date as conjectured above, and that Mr. Peake was chosen upon Mr. Woodward's decease. One circumstance appears to justify this supposition, namely, the above place of meeting being five miles from any market town: the natural conclusion is, that they met there in consequence of the Five Mile Act, and other persecuting laws. Prior to that period, the pious in this neighbourhood used to assemble for the worship of God in the woods in its vicinity, or in the retired houses of private friends.

Mr. Wallin thus speaks of Mr. Thorowgood at the close of his sermon. "His moral conduct is well known among those who were intimate with him: he was a man of sobriety and faithfulness, and an industrious and generous spirit ran through the whole of his conversation. In generosity he exceeded most in his circumstances, being always hospitable to the utmost of his ability. By the blessing of God on his industry, he was helped to provide for a large family, which he lived to see grow up to the third generation. His children, grand children, and great grand children amounted to the number of seventy-eight, forty-five of whom are now alive. Mr. Thorowgood was indulged with peculiar talents

for service in his day, both in civil and also in religious life. With respect to the former, he was trained up to no particular employment, yet he turned his hand to divers occupations* with an aptness and success somewhat astonishing, which shewed that he had good natural abilities, and that a blessing attended their application. Many have had cause to be thankful for him as the instrument of their enjoying some benefits which were not to be expected from one in his station. He was very successful in helping those who were afflicted with ruptures; on which account it is thought by some that his removal will be a great loss, and especially among the poor who fall under that calamity, with whom he was always very tender and moderate. I cannot forget (adds Mr. Wallin) on this occasion to acknowledge myself an instance; for he greatly assisted me in a case that had been long attempted in vain by several persons of repute in the profession, to which relief more properly belonged. A damage I sustained when at nurse, which being concealed, as I suppose, through fear, left me under an incurable lameness. The deceased undertook to help me when I was about fourteen years of age, and, blessed be God, he so

* A deacon of the church, now in the 82nd year of his age, says he was a blacksmith. This reflects no disgrace on his name or work. John Bunyan was a tinker; a greater than either was a tent-maker. [Acts, xviii. 3.]—He who is Lord of all was a carpenter, [Mark, vi. 3.]

far succeeded as to enable me to walk in a more comfortable manner than it was expected I ever should; and this was the product of a few months only."

"Nor was the deceased less eminent for his services in the church of God. He was, when in his youthful vanity, by a singular Providence induced to go and hear Mr. Hayworth, who was then the dissenting minister at Hertford. The occasion of Mr. Thorowgood's first serious thoughts was the following:—Sir William Cooper, who resided at Hertford Castle, gave him and another an invitation to his house for some innocent recreation, and accordingly they went; but it was upon the Lord's day. The choice of that day for pleasure (which, it is to be lamented, is now grown very common) greatly offended a pious servant in the family, who with much seriousness remonstrated upon the folly of which they were guilty; and particularly addressing Mr. Thorowgood, endeavoured to convince him of the evil of neglecting public worship, and spending the day in sensual delights, and also exhorted him to think of his sinful condition. To these things Mr. Thorowgood's attention was roused. He fell under some conviction; and being advised by the same person to hear Mr. Hayworth, he readily complied, and through a divine blessing, the happiest consequences followed. How conspicuous are the wisdom and grace of God when he meets with a senseless sinner who is ungratefully wandering from him! And should not this instance of divine goodness encourage

persons of every rank to be ready to instruct the ignorant and those that are out of the way?

Upon hearing Mr. Hayworth his mind was so impressed with the Divine Word, that from that time he chose to attend and continue under the same means. It was the pleasure of the Almighty that he was soon enlightened and brought to that trust in Christ which he held fast to the end, having obtained a good hope through grace. He could not satisfy himself without obeying the commands of his Redeemer, and therefore joined himself to the church at Hertford, with whom he walked in a becoming manner, and visibly grew in spiritual knowledge. "A worthy person (says Mr. Wallin) who was intimate with Mr. Thoroughgood from the beginning, told me since his decease, that after his profession he grew space in the understanding of divine things, insomuch that his minister would frequently advise troubled souls to discourse with him for their relief."

After some time he saw reason to alter his sentiments concerning Baptism, and was not ashamed to own his convictions, however it might lessen him in the esteem of some who were otherwise minded. "Steadiness under a profession is very commendable (observes Mr. Wallin), but this may consist with some alteration respecting the doctrines and duties of Christianity; for in the present state of things, true disciples may have need of being taught the way of the Lord more perfectly." However, our friend, after a careful examination, bore his testimony to what

he was now fully persuaded to be a part of the gospel of Christ, by a conformity thereto: nevertheless, he continued his fellowship till some years after.

“ When he became a member of this church, which was then under the care of Mr. Peake, he was soon called to the work of the ministry. Being invited, he preached for twelve years at a neighbouring village called Bendish, with universal satisfaction and great usefulness, till the death of your pastor, when, as some of you know, he was unanimously chosen and solemnly set apart to that office in his stead: this is about thirty-six years ago. It is, indeed, somewhat extraordinary, that one in his advanced age and under the grievous disorder which had for some years attended him, should, after having travelled the usual journey of ten miles, (which, during the above number of years he did, being seldom prevented) be able to carry on the worship of God, and that with remarkable spirit till within eight days of his departure. Those who attended him in his illness, which continued but four days, testified that he expressed much confidence and joy in the everlasting covenant, and that he was greatly comforted by many promises he had long since embraced by faith, and which had often been the subject of his ministry. The concerns of this life but little affected him in his views of that which is to come; and, indeed, such was his general frame and conduct all his days, that it would not be easy to find a person on the one

hand more industrious, and on the other at the same time less anxious about worldly things. However, when in the prospect of death, he was, in a manner, wholly employed in contemplating his Redeemer, and rejoicing in the heritage of God's people. The last words he was heard to speak distinctly, and which was about an hour before he went off, were the following:—'Whom having not seen, I love; in whom, though now I see him not, yet believing, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Which last clause he repeated with earnestness and with seeming delight. This was near two o'clock on Monday morning, and at three he gave up the ghost. Thus died Jonas Thorowgood in the 76th year of his age." The subject he chose for his funeral, and which Mr. Wallin preached upon in the Meeting-house then in Little Parn-don, was 2nd Timothy, i. 12. "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Mr. Thorowgood was succeeded in the pastoral office, by Mr. John Nottage who was a native of Essex. In the year 1756, a piece of freehold land was given by Mr. Joseph Wright, of Har-low, to build a Meeting-house upon, in Potter's Street. Upon its completion the church removed from Parndon into it, and Mr. Nottage afterwards collected from the religious public, a sufficiency to discharge the expence of the building. Mr. Nottage continued pastor more than twenty years, when, from some cause at present un-

known, he resigned his pastoral office.* He died in April, 1776, and was interred in the burial ground belonging to the church of the Baptist denomination in Harlow. A funeral sermon was preached on the occasion of his death by Mr. Gould, late pastor of the Baptist church in Harlow, who in his sermon thus speaks of him. "The Rev. Mr. John Nottage, whose death we now improve, was for many years pastor of a church of Christ in a neighbouring village, and a faithful preacher of the gospel of Christ. The Lord was pleased to bless his ministry with very considerable success, and particularly at his first coming into these parts. He was instrumental, we have reason to believe, in the hand of God, to the conversion of many souls (one of whom is now a faithful and successful labourer in the Lord's vineyard),† and of raising the church and interest of Christ in which he ministered statedly, far beyond what they were ever known to be before; till at length, for reasons best known to himself and to the people to whom he ministered, he resigned his pastoral charge; and being depressed with grief and with growing infirmities of body, he entirely declined the ministerial work. He is now gone beyond the applause or censure of dying mortals: the lamp of life is extinguished; the

* During the time of his ministry the church held open communion, but this was not the cause of his resignation.

† Supposed to be Mr. Pilley, of Luton, Bedfordshire.

dust is returned to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it,' to receive, I trust, a gracious reward for the faithful services he was enabled to perform, under the aids of divine grace, for God. 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.'"—Rev. xiv. 13.

"With respect to his character and conduct in life, (adds Mr. Gould) I shall say very little: doubtless he had his failings and infirmities, and so have the best of men here below. Ministers of the gospel are subject to like passions with other men, as the apostle James observes of the prophet Elias. Whatever, therefore, appeared commendable in the conduct of our deceased brother, be careful to imitate; whatever appeared otherwise endeavour to avoid; and let us be concerned in the strength of divine grace to follow his example, so far as he appeared to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are enabled thus to do, we shall, ere long I hope, meet with our deceased brother in that blessed world where all the inhabitants are sinlessly perfect."

Mr. Nottage was succeeded by Mr. James Brown, a native of Kent, who was called to the ministry by the Baptist church in Unicorn-yard, Southwark, then under the care of that excellent man of God, Mr. Clark, under whom he went through a course of studies prior to his entering on ministerial labours. He was ordained over the church in Potter's Street, July 19th, 1775; was with and over the church nearly 30

years. He died in London, whither he went for medical aid, in October, 1803: his mortal remains were buried in the ground adjoining the Meeting-house where he had so long laboured. An oration was delivered by Mr. Severn, then the Baptist minister in Harlow; and on the following Lord's day his death was improved by Mr. Thomas Thomas, of Peckham, from the 1st. Epistle of John, iv. 8. middle clause. "God is love." These were the last words Mr. Brown was heard to articulate.

During the greater part of the time that he ministered here to the church, he kept a seminary for the tuition of young gentlemen in Harlow town, two miles from Potter's Street. He had the honour and happiness to educate some who are ornaments now in civil and religious life; and to whom his memory is dear, on account of the paternal affection he exercised towards them, and the pleasant facility with which he imbued their juvenile minds with religious and moral instruction. The Great Head of the Church did not suffer him to labour in vain: many seals were given to him as a minister of the everlasting gospel. His last days appear to have been most successful. He was, say they who knew him, a plain, faithful, and most affectionate preacher of the truth as it is in Jesus; he was greatly beloved, and his removal by death was deeply lamented by the people of his charge: he was highly esteemed by all who had the happiness of his acquaintance, for he was a man of an excellent spirit. He was in the fifty-second

year of his age when he died.* Some years before his death he introduced the gospel to the village of Roydon, five miles from Harlow ; and in a short time, with the assistance of a few wealthy individuals who advanced 50*l.* each, a small and commodious Meeting-house was erected there. When the Baptist churches in Essex formed themselves into an association to spread the gospel in those parts of the county where it was not, two young men, Messrs. Pilkington and Bolton, were found disposed to become itinerants. They being approved of, the association judged it needful that they should be put in the possession of some advantages they then had not ; and Mr. Brown was fixed upon to take them under his instruction for a time, before they entered upon the all-arduous and important work, in which Jehovah signally owned both of them in planting a church by each,—Mr. Pilkington in Rayleigh, and Mr. Bolton in Thorp. During their stay with Mr. Brown, they exercised their gifts in the Meeting-house in Roydon and other places in the neighbourhood. After these young men left Mr. Brown, he, for some unknown cause, gave up the meeting in Roydon to

* Mr. Brown published a fast-day sermon during the American war, in which he very justly censured and deplored that iniquitous and fatal measure, as a course of evil which might be expected to bring down the judgment of God upon the nation. He likewise composed a catechism for youth upon the general principles of the gospel.

the General Baptists of the new connection,—when Mr. Dan. Taylor, late of London, sent a Mr. Driver to preach there. Several persons were brought to the knowledge of the truth, who were baptized and formed into a church by Mr. Taylor, and Mr. Driver was ordained over them in 1804. In a few years he died, when a few persons of the Independent persuasion obtained possession of the house, and became responsible for the debt due to the proprietor, and the loan bond. An open communion was set up : and the late truly worthy Dr. Simpson administered the ordinance of the Lord's Supper to them. They were supplied for a considerable time by the students in Hoxton academy, in which Dr. Simpson presided, until Mr. Gunn, Independent minister, who removed from Hadleigh in Suffolk, came among them and continued but a few years, when he removed to Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. Upon his removal, they were supplied by the students of Cheshunt college for a time, then by the students in the Baptist Institution at Stepney, and since then by various ; in this present year, 1819, they are without a pastor.

Mr. Brown was succeeded by the writer of this account, a native of Murrayshire in Scotland, who was called to the ministry by the Baptist church in White Row, Portsea, then under the pastoral care of Mr. Peter Edwards, 1786. After itinerating seven years in some villages in the vicinity of Portsmouth and Portsea, he was invited in 1793, by the particular Baptist church in

Downton, Wiltshire, and was ordained over them January 1, 1794. Mr. Edwards, his pastor, gave the charge, and Mr. Horsey, pastor of the first Baptist church, Portsea, preached to the church. In December, 1803, the writer resigned his pastoral office in the church at Downton. Being invited by the church, he came here as a probationer, January 1, 1804, and was set apart to the office of pastor the 7th of July following. Mr. Severn of Harlow delivered an introductory discourse, and received the confession of faith. Mr. Upton, of London, addressed the pastor; Mr. Brodie, of Potter's Bar, preached to the church; and Mr. Chaplin, Independent minister of Bishop's Stortford, concluded the services of the day in prayer.

In this year a petition was drawn up by the trustees of the meeting-house, praying the Lord of the Manor (Earl Guildford) to grant a piece of the waste ground in Potter's Street, to build a dwelling-house for the use of the present and all future ministers of this church and congregation. The petition was readily signed by the copyholders, and when presented was immediately granted. The ground was afterwards made free and given to the trustees for the above purpose. The erection of a house was directly begun. A case was drawn up; and after raising a sum of money among the congregation, it was presented by the writer to the friends of religion, when a sufficiency was soon obtained to discharge all the expence of building. A contributor who gave seven guineas towards the building, observed, the

building might be the means, under Providence, of continuing the gospel in the village. Of the many who contributed, were some worthy and honourable Members of Parliament, some of whom were of the established church. When they understood that Potter's Street is nearly three miles from the parish church, they gave readily, observing that it was probable that many who attend the worship of God in this place would otherwise go no where for that sacred purpose.

There have been left the following donations to this interest, viz. 50*l.* by the late Mr. Bride of Waltham Abbey, which sum was applied by the trustees to the house built for the accommodation of the minister, under the just idea that the minister would be equally benefited as if he received the interest.—A second donation of 50*l.* was left by the late Mrs. Elizabeth Speed, widow, of Harlow, and a member of the church here; after paying the legacy duty, 45*l.* is in the hands of the trustees to be disposed of in repairs or what way they may think best for the cause.

From the foregoing brief narrative there is abundant cause for blessing and praise to the eternal Jehovah, for his care and kindness in continuing his gospel among the poor in this place. Let us, through the Divine Saviour's grace, say, Hitherto the Lord hath helped us; and let past appearances stimulate us to trust in him for future blessings.